

water/ethanol azeotrope is injected at the top of the column for the distillation of the gas mixture extracted from the esterification reaction medium, and in that crude ethyl lactate is then continuously extracted, which crude ethyl lactate is subjected to purification, from which an ethyl lactate of high purity and heavy products are obtained. --;

Claim 4: Please replace the entire text of claim 4 with the following:

--(currently amended) The process as claimed in claim 3, characterized in that the selective adsorption of water, by passing, at a pressure identical to that applied to the esterification reaction medium, the water/ethanol mixture close to the azeotrope in the gas form through a bed of molecular sieve, and then the desorption of the water adsorbed beforehand, by lowering the pressure below 300 mbar and preferably below 100 mbar, are carried out alternately. --.

The specification has been amended as follows:

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Page 4, line 12: Please insert the following into the specification at page 4, before the Detailed Description of the Invention:

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Brief Description of the Drawing

Figure 1 is a schematic of a device which can be used to carry out the process of the present invention.

Conclusion

3. All questions pertaining to an application that has been allowed should be directed to the Office of Patent Publications Image Assistance Center at 888-786-0101.